Guest Editorial

The Difference Between

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Let's walk through the aftermath of a mishap. The details don't matter much—any mishap at all will do.

First, the victim will need initial or emergency treatment for injuries. This treatment could be as simple as basic first aid from shipmates or as complex as a massive EMT and fire-department presence in your workcenter.

Question: How much work is getting done while all this activity is going on?

The victim might need to go to medical. Even if she is able to get there under her own power, you've lost that worker for a considerable part of the day, at the very least. If a shipmate has to help the victim to medical, you lose even more time.

Next, your workcenter's safety representative will have to stop his normal job to start investigating the mishap. He will have to interview witnesses, examine and clean up the scene, and act as the liaison with the safety office—all of which takes more time out of the production schedule. Meanwhile, the safety representative and the chief will have to stop their regular work to fill out the mishap reports. Then the LPO, LCPO, division officer, and the department head will have to explain to the CO what happened and why.

Investigations by a safety-investigation board and legal officer also may follow. Each one will involve interviewing witnesses, safety representatives, supervisors, and the victim. Your workcenter-training records will be reviewed, which probably will involve your training petty officer. All these people will be unavailable for their normal jobs during the interviews.

Last, there is post-mishap training. Your entire workcenter will have to stop work and hold training on the mishap—what caused it, what contributed to it, and what they can do to prevent it from happening again.

If you stop and look at all the time lost by now, it becomes readily apparent how much better it is—on every level—just to slow down and do the job ***right***, instead of ***right now***. The few minutes you lose putting on the proper PPE and following procedures are nothing, compared to the time you may lose if you hurry a task. Somehow, we always have time to do things right—***after*** a mishap.

Commander Naval Safety Center, RADM George Mayer, says, "Nothing we do in peacetime is worth somebody's life." Even in the current time of international crises, none of the jobs we do at MARMC are so critical that we—as supervisors and leaders—carelessly should risk the life and health of the men and women under our care.

Instead, we have a ***responsibility*** to protect everyone under our command, direction or authority. We must protect subordinates from themselves—from the many hazards that beset them in their chosen line of work and, most importantly, from creating a false sense of urgency about the work they do. Subordinates must take responsibility for their actions, too, and pay attention to their own safety.

The work we do here at MARMC is important—we keep a significant portion of the Navy in condition to sail into harm's way. And, while very few tasks ***require*** us to risk the lives of our Sailors, we do so... on a recurring basis. Just because we may get away with it for a while doesn't make it right, safe, or a good idea. We're playing Russian roulette with the lives of our shipmates every time we let the work schedule encourage risky shortcuts.

The law of averages ***always*** catches up with you if you keep doing something the wrong way long enough—and it's ***always*** our fault when it happens. Don't take shortcuts; don't allow your eagerness (or that of your subordinates) to go on liberty override basic precautions.

The maintenance-availability schedule is not worth your life or that of your shipmate. It isn't worth getting anyone hurt, sick, or permanently disabled.

What sort of guidance are we, the leaders and supervisors, providing? Is a good evaluation or fitness report worth more than your shipmates' lives and limbs? More importantly, do the people down on the

"Right" and "Right Now"

Navy photo by PH3 Gary B. Granger

Whether it's administering basic first aid, like these Sailors are learning, or treating more serious injuries, a lot of lost time is involved. The answer is to slow down and do the job *"right,"* instead of *"right now."*

deck plates think your primary motivation is meeting the schedule? If they do, then you're part of the problem.

Get involved in safety. Make it your first priority, and make sure your subordinates know it's your first priority. Keep track of shipmates who have more mishaps than others—they probably require closer supervision. Pay attention to the results of the daily walk-throughs, workplace inspections, and zone inspections. Are you seeing the same or similar hits regularly? If so, you're getting warning signs that the law of averages is catching up with you.

We never must let the death or injury of a shipmate become just another statistic. Don't accept mishaps as "the price of doing business." Help establish a culture where people pay attention to what they're doing, think about what could go wrong, and decide what can be done to prevent it. Empower them to act on their knowledge and experience, and reward them for the lives they save. Leaders need to be involved in establishing these habits and attitudes—both on and off the job.

The people who work for us are our most important assets. If you don't take care of them, they can't—or won't—take care of you. If you're in a leadership position, your reputation is in their hands.